



ROLE OF ECOTOURISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN UDAIPUR DISTRICT OF RAJASTHAN

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Abstract

Udaipur district is situated in the Southern part of Rajasthan. For a very long time, it has been considered a harbor for tourists both foreign and domestic as shown by various reports and statistics. Udaipur is very well known for its rich culture, heritage, mesmerizing forts and palaces and beautiful lakes. These attractive tourist destinations have somehow overshadowed the natural resources of the Udaipur district. This trend has started to change over the past few years with the wildlife sanctuaries of the district getting tourists visiting these areas the whole year. Ecotourism has been emerging in the district at a gradual pace. In this paper, we have studied wildlife sanctuaries of the Udaipur district and the impacts of ecotourism on the development of indigenous communities in the region.

Keywords: Harbor, Tourists, Natural Resources, Wildlife, Indigenous Communities

INTRODUCTION

With the amount of pressure increasing on the environment and the eruption of new threats every single day, it becomes essential to think of a way which promotes sustainable development. Ecotourism is one such concept in the wider concept of sustainable tourism. Initially, the idea of ecotourism was limited to certain nations and specific areas but owing to its increasing importance, it has been accepted by a majority of the nations. Ecotourism is a

form of sustainable tourism which tries to bring the synthesis between the human population and the biotic factors. It is a kind of tourism which encourages appreciation of nature in its true and existing state. Ecotourism not only facilitates sustainable development but also ensures a significant contribution to the economy of the locals and the nation at large. The motive of an eco-traveler is not just to visit the natural and cultural sites but rather to enjoy nature in its most pristine state. According to the National Ecotourism Strategy, “ecotourism is nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable. This definition recognizes the ‘natural environment’ included cultural components and the ‘ecologically sustainable’ involves an appropriate return to the local community and long-term conservation of the resource.”

The entire idea of ecotourism depends on the existence of a healthy ecosystem. When there is a threat to wildlife, there is an absence of harmony between humans and animals and when there exist many threats to a stable ecosystem, the entire concept and institution related to it stand on the verge of collapse. Among many issues that pose a threat to the sustainability of a stable ecosystem, one widespread, serious issue is human-animal conflict. It is an emerging, frequent and grave issue that endangers human life and livelihood on one hand and disturbs the sensitive balance of the ecosystem on the other hand. This has a major impact on the social and economic aspects of the community living in the area. So, for the promotion of sustainable development, the benefit of local communities and the advancement of ecotourism development there is a need for the conservation of wild wildlife conservation of wildlife not only results in the increasing population of its inhabitants but also gives immense opportunity for the development of the area.

Study Area

Udaipur district known for its architectural heritage and beautiful lakes is located in the southern part of Rajasthan. The adjoining districts of Udaipur are Pali, Rajsamand, Sirohi, Chittorgarh, Dungarpur, and Pratapgarh districts and the state of Gujarat. The district of Udaipur stretches between 48° 05.79” to 25° 06' 16.75” North latitude and 73° 01' 23.10” to 74° 26' 20.87” East longitude covering an approximate area of 11,773 sq. km. The district is blessed with so many rivers like Jakham, Sabarmati, Som, Bherach, Ayad and Sei which are parts of three major river basins of Rajasthan viz. Sabarmati, Mahi and Banas.

The total forest cover in the district of Udaipur is maximum compared to other districts of Rajasthan. The total forest area in Udaipur is 2753.39 sq. km. which is around 23.49% of the total geographical area of the district. The district has 1212.93 sq. km of Moderately Dense Forest (MDF) and 1540.46 sq. km of Open Forest (OF). There is no Very Dense Forest (VDF) in the district.

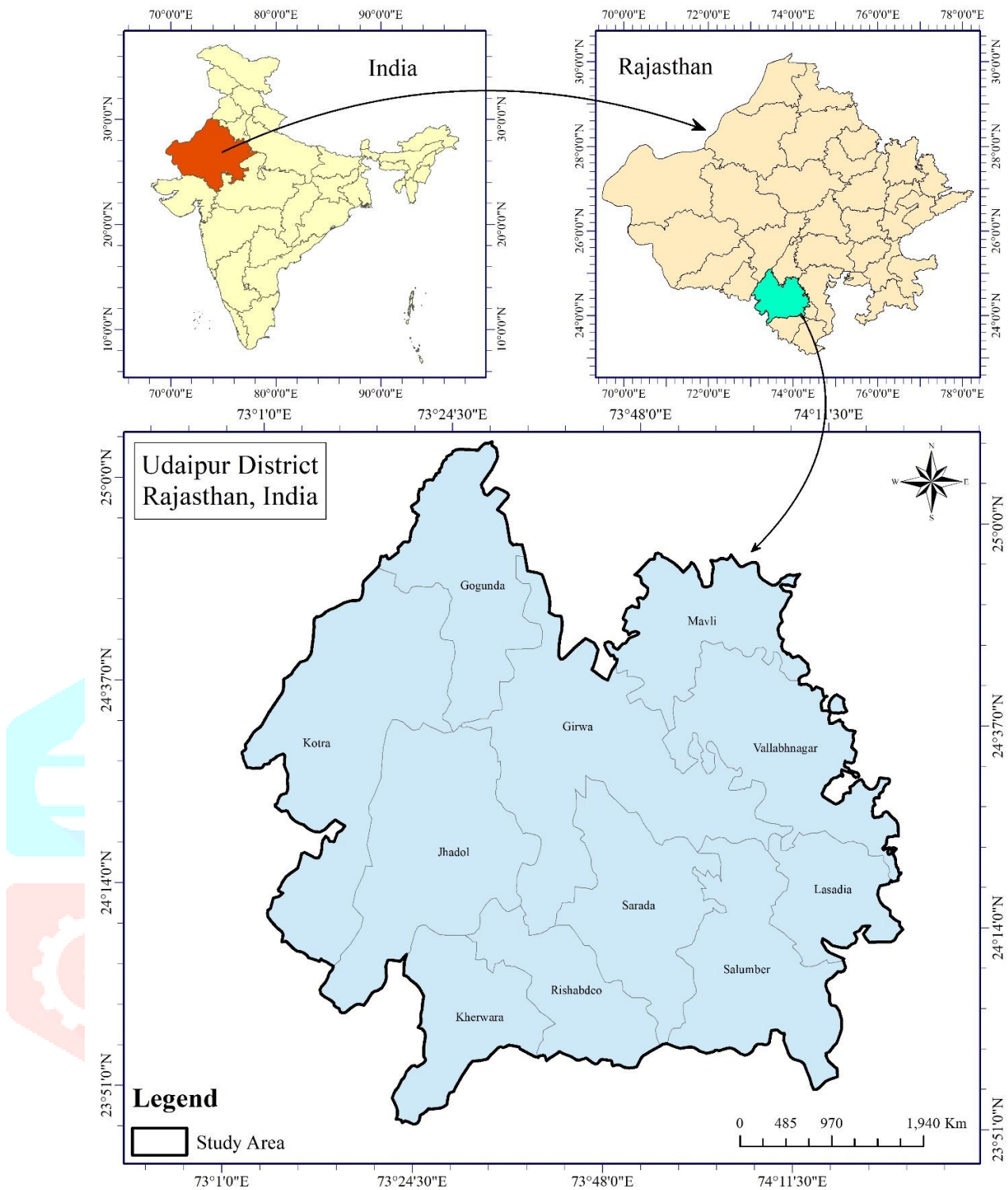


Fig 1. Study Area

Ecotourism in Rajasthan

Rajasthan owing to its history, and cultural, geographical and ecological diversity is one of the favourite destinations in the world. The impression of Rajasthan among tourists is quite fascinating because of the rich culture, historical monuments, forts, step-wells, exquisite palaces etc. The state has been encompassed in 34.22 million ha area which is 10% of the geographical area of India. From the total area of Rajasthan, Forest Department

administers 9% of the area which includes almost 5 national parks, 25 wildlife sanctuaries, 2 Ramsar sites, 14 Conservation Reserves etc., in addition to the vast expanses of the desert ecosystem. Apart from these above-mentioned green sites, the beautiful Aravalli ranges act as a water divide. The rich biodiversity, scenic places, water bodies and dense forests make it a unique destination for eco-tourists. The state of Rajasthan offers beautiful destinations and a unique canvas for eco eco-travellers to keep a keen interest in getting along with the elements of nature. Nature-based activities like trekking, camping, trailing, birding etc. are offered to the adventurers here which gives them a chance to get an adrenaline rush.

Some of the magnificent monuments and wilderness areas lie within the forests, which form the core of the tourists travelling as well as a source of livelihood for the area's local communities. This way these woods serve the dual purpose of giving a natural respite to the tourists visiting the area, as well as it, becomes a source of economic independence for these dwellers.

Ecotourism and its Impacts on Local Communities

In this study, we have studied 3 wildlife sanctuaries which are wholly situated in the Udaipur district of Rajasthan. Sajjangarh Wildlife sanctuary, Phulwari Ki Naal Wildlife sanctuary and Jaisamand Wildlife Sanctuary are the sanctuaries that we have studied thoroughly.

These 3 wildlife sanctuaries have also been recognized by Birdlife International due to their importance as a major destination for migratory birds. This has made bird lovers excited about these sites and there is a significant increase in bird lovers visiting these destinations.

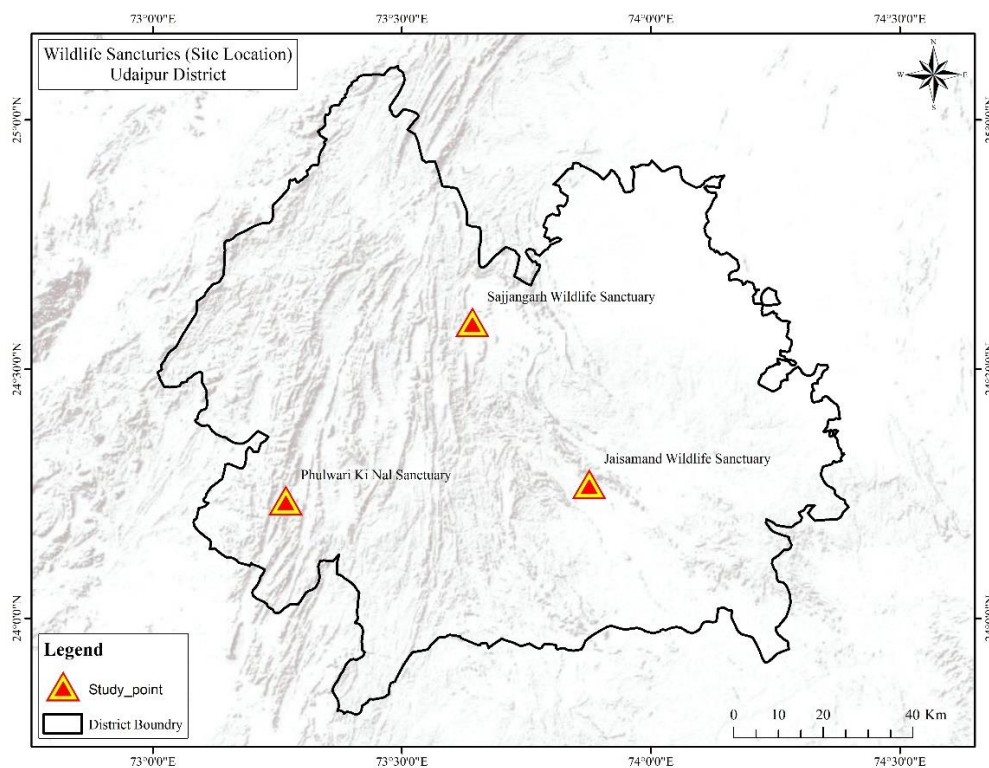


Fig. 2. Wildlife Sanctuaries wholly situated in the Udaipur district

Positive Impacts

One of the many benefits of ecotourism is its contribution to the development of the local population. With the study of secondary sources and the analysis of forest cover report and tourists' influx in this region, it has become clear that with the increased awareness of ecotourism, the number of tourists that visits this region has increased significantly. Earlier, the majority of tourists chose only historical places and lakes as their point of destination but the rapid increase in eco-tourism in the district of Udaipur has taken off significant pressure from typical tourist destinations situated in the city mainly City Palace, Fateh Sagar Lake, Pichola lake etc. There has been a shift in the projection of tourists from these famous tourist destinations to ecotourism destinations with the continuous efforts of the forest department, local communities and other stakeholders involved. The money that results and is saved from releasing the environmental pressures is put back into conservation and preservation efforts.

This alternative form of tourism also contributes to the development of the region. Though the ecotourists have come intending to visit a natural space some means of transportation are required for that individual to reach that particular place, similarly, some of the tourists are not entirely comfortable with the idea of spending the night in the woods, in that case, they choose local inn and hotels for their stay. The arrival of tourists expects the prior establishment of various services and institutions. As a result of which it indirectly employs scores of people. Whether it is transportation or power supply everything needs human resources and thespian resource is made available to the local population only.

The outreach of information across the world has allowed people from other countries to visit the Udaipur district. The local communities have grasped this opportunity with both hands. Residents at their full capacity have provided services and patronage to local communities. This is most evident in the Sajjangarh Wildlife Sanctuary. This wildlife sanctuary is the closest to the district headquarters and therefore enjoys the largest number of tourists visiting. The local dwellers living near the wildlife sanctuaries also provide ecotourists with knowledge about cultural literacy. The hospitality offered by the local people by incorporating cultural lodging, food, history and activities enriches the knowledge of tourists about the district of Udaipur and its rich cultural heritage. The trade done with the help of handicrafts also helps in the promotion of local culture. The service provided by the local people and art pieces created by the local artisans not only become a harbinger of their growth but also works as a tool for mouth-to-mouth publicity. This not only saves money on promotion and marketing but also enables these local people to take pride in their culture and ecotourism destinations have provided substantial opportunities for employment to the indigenous population of Udaipur. Residents are involved in ecotourism activities as guides, experts, merchants and hosts to visiting tourists. Increased inflow of tourists to these wildlife destinations led to the increase in money funneling directly to the local communities and increases their higher standard of living.

Negative impacts

As we have already considered all the positive impacts of tourism, it is time to take cognizance of the negative impacts of ecotourism on local communities and the environment. Although we have counted multiple ways by which the local community gets benefitted this growth has risk factors attached to it. The local community can get involved in these high-paying newly offered jobs leaving behind their traditional occupation. Although it provides them with economic benefits puts this indigenous culture at risk. Some of the tourists visiting the wildlife sanctuaries do not follow the philosophy of ecotourism in its true sense and their footprint on the forest affects the overall ecosystem of the region. There are times when trees get felled to make ecological lodges. These actions instead of supporting the idea of ecotourism put the entire philosophy and idea at risk. But mindful tourism and support of this ecotourism in its true spirit can gear us to the maximum benefits without causing any damage to the environment.

Conclusion:

This paper analyzes how ecotourism contributes to the development of local communities. The above study brings us to the idea that only with the appropriate policy, proper planning and tactful application, the philosophy of ecotourism can be translated into a long-term and beneficial activity. We also observe that ecotourism must have social, environmental and economic implications if we want it to be a permanent alternative.

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